

While We Were Still Sinners

By Keith E Gatling

Sermon for June 27, 1993

Lessons for the Fourth Sunday After Pentecost - Year A

Psalm 100

Exodus 19:2-8a

Romans 5:6-11

Matthew 9:35-10:8

"But God proves his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

Paul said that in Romans. Chapter 5, verse 8, to be exact. That's a verse to remember, which is not to say that you can junk the rest of the Bible, no...not at all. But this verse is of particular importance...so much so that I'm gonna repeat it:

"God proves his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

Did you hear that? Did you really hear and understand what Paul said there? Well, at the risk of really annoying you, I'm gonna say it one more time:

"God proves his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

God loves us...not because of anything we've done...but *while* we're sinners. God didn't say, "Be perfect and then I'll love you," he said, "You're a sinner and I love you enough to die for you." Wow.

Hi, my name is Keith...and I'm a sinner. And to paraphrase something Darren Stephens

once said when describing his mother-in-law on the old TV show Bewitched, I can say with absolutely no malice, that you're all sinners too. That *is* why we're here, isn't it? Not because we're particularly better than anyone else, not because we've worked harder, or done more...but because we're sinners. Our sins may not be as obvious as the person next door who kicks the dog, the one across the street who cheats on her taxes, or the person whose sexual lifestyle we disagree with, but we are sinners nonetheless. And that's why we're here.

But wait...there's more. If it were just that we were sinners, what would be the point? Why bother coming here week after week just to make ourselves more depressed in the knowledge that we're totally messed up? That's not the whole story. The simple fact that *we are* sinners is a start, but that's all...just a start. As Paul Harvey might say...the rest of the story is that God loves us. And that's why we're here. Because God loves us. God loves me. God loves you, you, and yes...even you.

Take a look at the Old Testament lesson. What had the Israelites done to merit God's delivering them from Egypt and making them his people? Nothing. There were probably other cultures that had more

accomplishments to speak of, there were probably also other cultures that we just better all around people. Let's face it, as far as cultures went at the time, by pretty much any standard the Israelites were nothing. But God showed his love for the Israelites while they were still nothing...while they had done nothing to deserve it.

And look at the Gospel lesson. What had any of the twelve done to merit Jesus picking them to be his apostles? Were they particularly better than anyone else in the area? One look at Peter and Judas should give you the answer to that question...and let's not forget the sons of Zebedee, who argued over who'd sit on which side of Jesus' throne. And yet Jesus picked them anyway...while they were still annoying little...well, you get the idea.

And let's go back to Paul. God loves us while we are still sinners. We haven't done anything to earn it. We *can't* do anything to earn it, so don't even bother trying. Don't sit there thinking of all the reasons why you're a "good Christian," because ultimately, it doesn't count. God loves us while we are still sinners, and what makes us Christians is our recognition of the fact that we're sinners, and that God loves us enough to have sent his Son to die for us...when he could've just looked at us and said, "Nah."

So...if God loves us while we're still sinners, if God picked the Israelites not because of anything they had done to earn being picked, if Jesus picked the disciples not because they were the best people in town, what's the deal?

First of all, there's what God can do with us. God took a ragtag bunch of enslaved nomads out of Egypt, and turned them into a great people...a people who, against odds that might have totally wiped out other peoples, are still strong today. Jesus took a ragtag bunch of fishermen, tax collectors, and assorted others, and with one exception, turned them into the people who helped spread the good news all over the world. And God can take us...with all our frailties, with all our petty sniping and "holier than thou" posturing...with all our sins...and turn us into something great too.

Second, knowing that God loves us while we're still sinners frees us. Yes, it frees us. It frees us from trying to do things to earn God's love. We already have it, it's a gift that's free for the taking, and you can't earn a gift. So then, if we can't *earn* God's love, then where does all the doing good stuff come in? Very simple, it's a *response*. We don't do good things to bribe God into loving us, we do them as a grateful response to his love for us. Knowing that God loves us while we're still sinners frees us from worrying about how to *earn* his love and frees us to respond *to* it. And perhaps our response will show others who are still caught up in trying to earn God's approval that he loves them already.

"God proves his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

My name is Keith and I'm a sinner. But I'm also a person that God loves...as are all of you. Respond to that.